



**THE SUPREME COURT OF MISSOURI
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 22 February 2007

**MISSOURI SELECTED TO PARTICIPATE IN NATIONAL INITIATIVE
ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE, MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES
Chief Justice Michael A. Wolff to Lead Statewide Task Force**

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – The Council of State Governments Justice Center announced today that Missouri is one of seven states selected to participate in the [*Chief Justices' Criminal Justice/Mental Health Leadership Initiative*](#), a national project designed to help state supreme court chief justices guide efforts in their states to respond better to people with mental illnesses in the criminal justice system. Missouri Chief Justice Michael A. Wolff will lead the statewide task force.

“There are thousands of persons with mental illnesses incarcerated in our state prisons, and there are thousands more on probation and parole who need mental health treatment,” Wolff said. “We believe this initiative will enhance Missouri’s efforts to reverse the worsening effects of mental illness by enabling the state’s three branches of government to formalize a strategic plan to help offenders deal with their illnesses and become more productive members of society.”

The Missouri Department of Corrections reports that 15.5 percent of the people incarcerated in the state have a mental illness. Five years ago, that number was 11.2 percent.

“The increasing number of persons with mental illness appearing in criminal courts, and the frequency with which they cycle through our prisons and jails, has significant implications for the administration of justice as well as public safety and government spending generally,” said Larry Crawford, director of corrections in Missouri.

According to a 2006 report by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, nearly a quarter of both state prisoners and jail inmates who reported they had a mental health problem had served three or more prior sentences. This makes them familiar faces in our nation’s courtrooms.

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CRIMINAL JUSTICE/MENTAL HEALTH TASK FORCE

Add one

In Missouri, offenders with a mental illness are 4 percent more likely to return to prison within two years of release than other offenders.

“Improving outcomes for people with mental illness involved in the criminal justice system requires extensive collaboration among leaders in the judiciary, the legislature, and the administrators of multiple state agencies,” said Mass. Rep. Mike Festa, chairman of the Justice Center Board of Directors. “We established this initiative because in many states, a state supreme court’s chief justice is uniquely positioned to convene and lead a multi-branch discussion on this issue that leads to real, meaningful action.”

The CSG Justice Center solicited applications from chief justices across the country interested in establishing a statewide task force on criminal justice/mental health issues. Twenty-three states submitted applications for the initiative, from which seven were selected. As part of the initiative, the task forces will receive technical assistance, access to leading national experts and a small amount of funding support. The Justice Center also will convene a two-day national policy forum this spring for the seven states.

Evelyn Stratton, associate justice of the Ohio State Supreme Court and co-chair of the advisory board that reviewed the applications, congratulated leaders in Missouri: “The application process was very competitive. The states selected had to demonstrate that they had engaged legislative and executive branch leaders and that their task force had the potential to yield a viable, comprehensive plan. Missouri clearly demonstrated the broad base of leadership necessary to make the plan successful, and we look forward to working with the state in the upcoming year.”

The Council of State Governments Justice Center is a national nonprofit organization that serves policymakers at the local, state and federal levels from all branches of government. The Justice Center provides practical, nonpartisan advice and consensus-driven strategies, informed by available evidence, to increase public safety and strengthen communities. This project is coordinated through the Judges’ Criminal Justice/Mental Health Leadership Initiative, managed by the Justice Center in partnership with the National GAINS Center. The support to the state task forces is made possible through grants awarded from the JEHT Foundation and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. Funding support for the planning phases of this project was provided by the U.S. Justice Department’s Bureau of Justice Assistance, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Substance Abuse and Mental Health System Administration.

For more information about the Judges’ Criminal Justice/Mental Health Leadership Initiative, please visit <http://consensusproject.org/JLI>.

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